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EDUCATION COMMITTEE

Monday, March 10, 2008

TESTIMONY Provided by Paul S. Timpanelli, President and CEO BRIDGEPORT REGIONAL BUSINESS COUNCIL

Members of the Education Committee, thank you very much for this opportunity. My name is Paul Timpanelli and I am the President and CEO of the *Bridgeport Regional Business Council*, a 1,000 member business association representing large and small businesses in the Greater Bridgeport Region, the majority of which are located in the City of Bridgeport.

In 2006, the leadership of the Business Council identified four major public policy areas as our work plan priorities in the years ahead. One of those areas was the quality of public education and closing the achievement gap clearly recognizing the direct relationship between that quest and the future economic vitality of our City, Region and State.

The leadership of our organization – representing all of the major employers in our Region – was very pleased last year by the Governor's bold step to at long last invest more State resources in public education in our State. This Legislature and this Committee were equally bold in its willingness to support added classroom investment. I am here today to inform you that the business leadership in our Region supports efforts that will result in further increasing the State's investment in our public school system, particularly in those school districts that are identified as distressed, such as Bridgeport.



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George Santa, Santa Fuel
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James Wendt, Town of Fairfield
Robert A. Werner, retired, Lacey Manufacturing

In addition, I am here today to assure you that your investment decision for Bridgeport will be a wise one. Surely our City's past history and its problems have forced many of you to say "Why invest more in Bridgeport when we don't know that what we invest now is being efficiently and wisely spent?"

The Bridgeport Regional Business Council, the City of Bridgeport and the Bridgeport Board of Education are now in the initial stages of a unique partnership and an important undertaking that will help us to answer that question. First, the Business Council, with the agreement and support of the Mayor, the School Superintendent, and the Board of Education, last year engaged a consultant that developed a plan to enable the City budget to be separated from the Board of Education budget and its management. That effort was paid for and managed by the business community. The resulting recommendations of that effort are now in the process of being implemented. Soon, we will seek the approval of the Board of Education to undertake a complete operational and management review of the City school system. That review will identify any and all efficiencies and savings within the system that we all have agreed will then be reinvested in the classroom. This initiative may cost as much as \$1.5 million and the Bridgeport regional business community is committed to raising the funds necessary through a public/private partnership to enable this work to be completed. If completed, Bridgeport will be the first and only school district in the State and somewhat unique in the Country to have such an analysis completed.



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This aggressive initiative is also one of the primary recommendations of the Board of Education's 2007 adopted school system Strategic Plan as developed by the Superintendent and a supporting community.

I tell you this today because I know that you need assurance that Bridgeport is committed to investing the dollars that you will dedicate to its school system wisely and efficiently. I can assure you that we are committed that the kind of money that you are talking about being invested in Bridgeport is invested wisely. Please be assured that the business community is very much engaged – in partnership with the school system and the City – to create a transparent and accountable budget that will enable the system's funding partners to be assured that your money is being used efficiently and wisely.

Your decision to alter the ECS funding formula to further benefit our State's urban districts could not come at a more crucial time. Bridgeport is ready to invest your dollars wisely and Bridgeport school children are ready to be prepared to succeed in life as a result of that investment.